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Making Learning Visible: Peer Review and the Scholarship of Teaching

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Making Learning Visible

Peer Review and the Scholarship of Teaching

March 26-28, 2004

Lincoln, Nebraska

A national conference investigating a vision of peer review of teaching which combines:

- inquiry into the intellectual work of a course
- careful investigation of student understanding and performance
- faculty reflection on their teaching effectiveness



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Lincoln

Featured Speakers



Lee Shulman
President, The Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching



Randy Bass
Executive Director of the Center for New
Designs in Learning and Scholarship and the Visible
Knowledge Project, Georgetown University



Allison Pingree
Director of Center for Teaching, Vanderbilt University



Barbara Cambridge
Vice President, Fields of Inquiry and Action and AAHE Director,
Carnegie Academy Campus Program



Mary Huber
Senior Scholar, The Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching

Featured Speakers



Pat Hutchings
Vice President, The Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching



Mary Deane
Sorcinelli Associate Provost for Faculty Development and
Director of the Center For Teaching, University of
Massachusetts Amherst



Nancy Van Note Chism
Associate Vice Chancellor for Professional Development and
Associate Dean of the Faculties, Indiana University
Purdue University Indianapolis



Sherry Linkon
Co-Director of the Center for Working-Class Studies,
Youngstown State University



Dan Bernstein
Director of the Center for Teaching
Excellence, University of Kansas

Conference Objective

This working conference will bring together the leaders of the peer review of teaching movement to explore the current status of peer review and to discuss how this form of peer collaboration contributes to larger conversations regarding the scholarship of teaching and learning.

Background

Faculty in higher education face tremendous difficulty in finding the time, resources, and expertise to document, assess, and improve student learning. Although student evaluations of teaching effectiveness are a useful tool for inquiring about what occurred during a course, there are aspects to the intellectual work of teaching that students are not able to evaluate effectively: Does the course have an acceptable level of academic rigor? Are objectives and topics appropriate to the course? Are evaluation methods fair? Does the course prepare students for advanced course work? Does the course teach the needed skills to be successful in the workplace? Is the instructor current in his/her field? Since these areas are essential to effective teaching, student evaluations need to be supplemented. Unfortunately, there are few successful models for formal peer reviews of teaching. Often times, peer review is construed to be a simple observation of the colleague's class session.

In contrast, a vision for peer review of teaching combines inquiry into the intellectual work of a course with a careful investigation and reflection of the quality of student understanding and performance. Over the past five years, a consortium of six universities (The University of Nebraska–Lincoln, Indiana University–Bloomington, The University of Michigan, Kansas State University, University of Kansas, and Texas A&M University) has developed campus communities that explore and apply peer review of teaching for documenting, promoting, and making visible the intellectual work of teaching. Faculty write a course portfolio providing examples and analysis of student work that demonstrates and reflects on the success of the course in helping students learn. The portfolio is posted on an electronic web site for peer sharing, discussion of curricular or programmatic issues, and for external review of the quality of student understanding. This conference seeks to highlight the work of the consortium and to sponsor conversations about the benefits and challenges to promoting peer review initiatives in postsecondary education.

History of this Project

Beginning in 1994, the University of Nebraska–Lincoln (UNL) joined eleven other universities in a national project organized by the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). Along with schools such as the University of Michigan, the University of Wisconsin, Northwestern University, Syracuse University, and the University of Georgia, UNL sent seven faculty to a summer institute on peer review. Working in discipline-based teams, this national group of faculty members helped shape and develop the kinds of interactions on teaching that would yield the most benefit for participating faculty.

In 1995 UNL received federal support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to expand beyond the original team. Over subsequent summers, a total of thirty UNL faculty (from all nine UNL colleges) received summer fellowships to engage in peer consultation on teaching.

In 1999, the peer review project was expanded beyond UNL to introduce faculty peer review efforts to four additional universities: Indiana University, Kansas State University, the University of Michigan, and Texas A&M University. Major funding for the inter-university collaboration and peer review community development comes from the Pew Charitable Trusts Funding; faculty elaboration of learning in general education at UNL comes from the Hewlett Foundation Funding; operation of the Peer Review Project Team and fellowship support comes from the University of Nebraska Foundation (the Pepsi Quasi-Endowment Fund).

A Model for Peer Review of Teaching

Our vision of Peer Review of Teaching is a faculty-driven initiative that provides faculty with a structured and practical model for documenting and reflecting on both the quantity and the quality of student learning in their courses. Faculty are encouraged to explore not only *what* students learn, but also to assess *how* they learn. The benefits of peer review extend far beyond the level of an individual course. Peer Review promotes educational reform at three different levels – by assisting faculty in evaluating and improving their students’ learning, by building interdisciplinary campus communities that support and refine this inquiry into student learning, and by challenging established campus attitudes about teaching.

Through its focused investigation into student learning, Peer Review of Teaching:

- Promotes faculty awareness about the challenges posed by diverse student learners, spurring faculty to think beyond traditional or “one size fits all” teaching approaches.
- Aids faculty in verbalizing the assumptions and goals about teaching that may have, until now, remained implicit (to themselves and to their students).
- Fosters interdisciplinary conversation on teaching that is both focused and more profound than the usual sharing of teaching techniques. These conversations help faculty identify common teaching and curricular issues across academic disciplines.
- Develops faculty skills to rigorously assess and review teaching as they meet to discuss and respond to each other’s portfolios and the curricular and programmatic issues that they raise.
- Creates a community of campus faculty peers across disciplines who can promote policies regarding teaching and student learning.
- Challenges campuses to create a student-centered curriculum as faculty develop a common language for documenting and assessing teaching as intellectual work. When faculty become more knowledgeable about criteria for improved student performance, they challenge students to become more responsible for and involved in their own learning.

To engage in these goals, faculty participate in a structured fellowship program where they write reflective interaction memos about their teaching. The memos are shared with team members for response. Faculty also meet with other project participants to share and discuss issues emerging from one another’s investigations. At the end of the year, faculty link the three interaction memos together to create a course portfolio that reflects on the success of the course in helping students learn. Previous faculty participants have used their portfolios as evidence of teaching effectiveness for teaching awards, promotion and tenure files, and accreditation reviews.

One type of portfolio is the **benchmark portfolio**. A benchmark portfolio represents a snapshot of students’ learning within a particular course and enables faculty to generate questions that they would like to investigate about their teaching. The prompts that follow represent the types of questions that faculty participants consider as they develop their benchmark portfolios.

Interaction 1: Reflections on the Syllabus

The first memo asks faculty to discuss the course syllabus and reflect on the course goals and the intellectual rationale for these goals. Typical questions include: What is your course about? What is the content area covered? Who are your students (e.g., first, fourth year, graduate majors or non-majors)? What do you want students to know? What do you want them to be able to do?

Interaction 2: Capturing the Particulars of Instructional Practice

In the second memo faculty reflect on their teaching methods, course assignments, and course materials. Some questions include “What teaching methods are you using during your contact time with students and how do these methods facilitate students’ achievement of course objectives? How do you measure student learning via these methods?” and “In what ways do you expect your choices for methods, materials, and assignments to assist your students in meeting the goals of your course?”

Interaction 3: Documenting and Analyzing Student Learning

In the third memo, faculty reflect on student learning by analyzing samples of student work. Typical questions include: “Is there evidence of students meeting the specific learning goals you selected and where do you see such understanding?,” “What criteria do you use to assess student understanding?” and “Does performance represented by student work indicate students have developed an understanding for your field of study that will be retained or that students can apply to new contexts?”

A second type of portfolio is an **inquiry portfolio**. This portfolio focuses around a specific question or issue regarding teaching practices, course structures, and student learning over time. For our Peer Review program, faculty initially write a benchmark portfolio to identify issues or questions within their teaching. They then develop an inquiry portfolio focusing specifically on that issue or question. An inquiry portfolio provides faculty with opportunities to document improvement in their teaching over time and to assess the long-term impact of teaching changes, the success of teaching approaches, and the accomplishment of student learning. The prompts that follow are designed to help faculty begin this scholarly investigation into their own teaching.

Interaction 1: Stating an Issue or Problem to Investigate

Faculty begin conceptualizing their inquiry portfolios by identifying issues to investigate, especially discussing why this issue is significant for their students' learning. They then reflect on the course's history and development, provide a rationale for selecting a specific problem for investigation, and examine the issue's history and significance within their teaching.

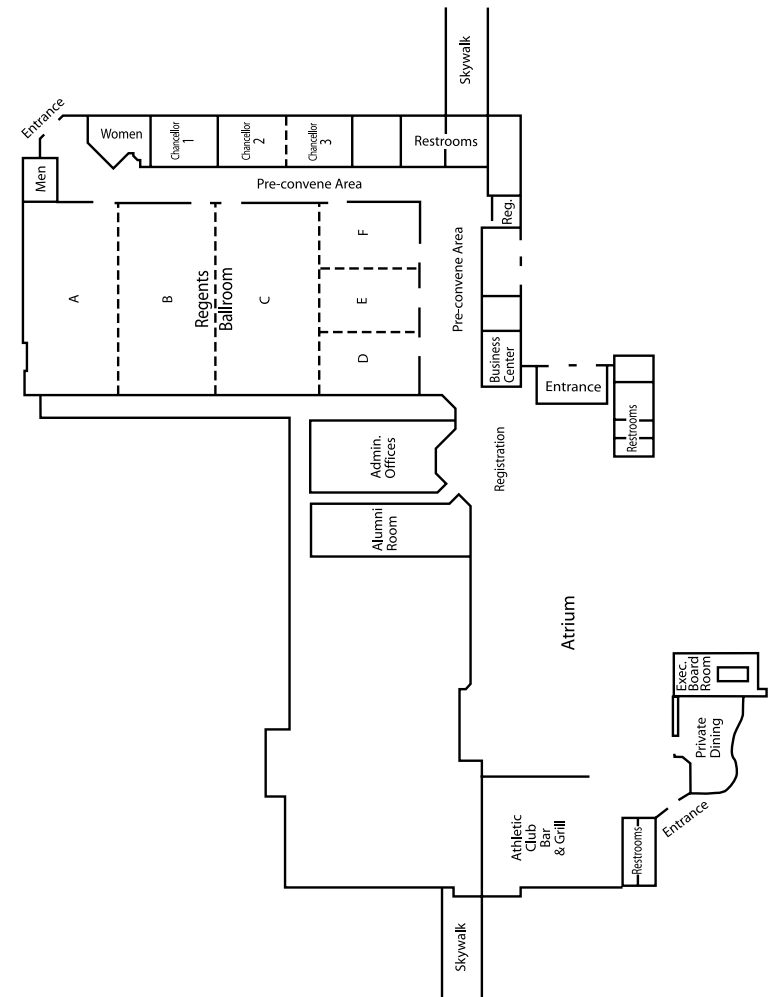
Interaction 2: Developing a Methodology for Investigation

Faculty next develop and describe their methodology for investigating the problem course materials or assignments, assessment of student work, etc.). This memo includes defining the problem, identifying types of classroom evidence (data) needed to study the issue more fully, conceptualizing sampling issues in the data collection process, and reflecting on the underlying assumptions of the methods that they have selected.

Interaction 3: Analyzing and Assessing Findings

The final memo has faculty analyze and interpret their collected data in order to answer the following questions: What do the data tell me about the problem/issue I originally chose to investigate? Do the data indicate my initial hypothesis is supported; or suggest that my initial hypothesis might be incorrect? Is there a new hypothesis emerging with respect to the issue I hoped to address? Are there new issues or questions emerging from the data that I hadn't considered or that help me to reframe the issues?

Map of Embassy Suites Hotel and Conference Center



Don and Velma Lentz Center for Asian Culture

The Lentz Center for Asian Culture is dedicated to the enrichment of knowledge and understanding of Asia. The Center's welcoming environment enables visitors to interact with Asian art objects, providing the opportunity for comprehension of the rich diversity and long history of Asian cultures. The permanent collection of the Lentz Center presents objects chosen for their historical importance, cultural significance and aesthetic appeal. It includes ancient ceremonial bronzes, jade and ivory carvings, Tibetan ritual objects, Chinese and Japanese ceramics, and other items that reveal facets of traditional Asian civilizations. The changing exhibits feature Asian ceramics, paintings, prints, sculpture, textiles, and more. Occasionally, these exhibitions are accompanied by other Asian cultural and educational events, including lecture series, film festivals and concerts. *Location:* 1155 Q Street. *Hours of Operation:*

Sunday	1:30 p.m.	4:00 p.m.
Monday	closed	
Tuesday	10:00 a.m.	5:00 p.m.
Wednesday	10:00 a.m.	5:00 p.m.
Thursday	10:00 a.m.	5:00 p.m.
Friday	10:00 a.m.	5:00 p.m.
Saturday	10:00 a.m.	5:00 p.m.

University of Nebraska State Museum – Morrill Hall

University of Nebraska State Museum has three floors of exhibits in Morrill Hall. These natural history exhibits highlight items from the Museum's seven research collections, as well as basic scientific ideas. Attractions include Native American art of the Southwestern U.S., fossils of dinosaurs and ancient elephants, wildlife dioramas, and costumes, arts, and artifacts of Africa. *Location:* 14th and U Street. *Hours of Operation:* Monday – Saturday (9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.), Sunday (1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

Haymarket District

Whether it is night or day, the historic Haymarket District, with its galleries, restaurants, boutiques and turn of the century buildings, is just a few blocks away. Antique shops, art galleries and the first microbrewery in Nebraska draw visitors and locals daily. *Location:* Between 7th and 9th Street, from O street to R Street.

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Sponsoring Organizations

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and
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